Dispatch

Each of the nine fire departments operates it's own Enhanced E-911 dispatch system. In 1991, thirteen communities in the MetroWest region received a grant to evaluate the feasibility of instituting a regional enhanced (E-911) dispatch system for the fire and police departments. A study prepared by an outside consultant indicated that a regional system would have been both more efficient and saved money for almost all of the communities. Although the study received involvement and participation from both the fire and police departments, ultimately it received only fragile support from those organizations. Combined with the fact that any of the regional dispatch scenarios would have required some initial start-up costs, the participating communities chose to remain on individual dispatch systems.

Collective Purchasing & Equipment Sharing

Members of Fire District Fourteen and Metrofire Association participate in the state bidding system for purchasing fire equipment and apparatus. This system allows communities to purchase at a lower price than that obtained if the town was working alone.

Both fire districts have also created equipment and supply sharing programs. District Fourteen owns one ambulance which is used as back up for any community requesting mutual aid. Metrofire Association's common resources include a foam bank, air supply, HazMat. apparatus and a van.

Hazardous Material Response Team

Responding to emergencies involving hazardous materials (HazMat) is done on a regional or district basis throughout the entire state. The HazMat response teams, including apparatus and training are completely funded by the state. None of the communities in MetroWest have their own HazMat trucks or apparatus. Trained fire fighters from the communities are available on-call to respond to incidents. Both Metrofire Association and District Fourteen coordinate the HazMat response teams in their districts, and communities are individually billed for the services when an incident is called within their boundaries.

Training

Both District Fourteen and Metrofire Association assist their members in coordinating some training and educational programs for the fire fighters on an as needed basis.

Mutual Aid Agreements

Mutual aid is an important component of the fire service in MetroWest. Under the coordination of Fire District Fourteen and Metrofire Association the MetroWest communities participate in non-reimbursed mutual aid agreements with neighboring towns. Generally, a dispatcher relies on mutual aid after the third request for backup is called *(third alarm)* sending in the closest available apparatus regardless of town boundaries **(Table 6).**

The Professional Fire Fighters of Massachusetts Union does not support mutual aid agreements as they are presently being administered. The PFFM does not believe that this type of arrangement is in the best interest of the fire fighters or the communities and fails to take full advantage of the gains that a regionalized department could bring to an area such as opportunities for advancement, a better benefit package and consistent pay scales. When a fire department uses mutual aid, back up apparatus and fire fighters are not dispatched to the emergency until after the first unit has been sent. The PFFM believes that this arrangement creates an unsafe gap of time for the primary department responding to the incident to be without sufficient backup. In addition, with demands for mutual aid on the increase, particularly from the smaller fire departments, some of the larger communities giving mutual aid are, in effect providing the receiving communities with fire service at no cost.